

THE SALE PRICE OF A DOCTOR'S SERVICES

At the recent Sacramento annual session of the California Medical Association, one of the addresses was entitled "The Cost of Medical Care." The caption of these comments may be said to be one phase on that subject. The address was made by Ray Lyman Wilbur, M. D., president of Stanford University and is printed in this issue of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE. Members of the California Medical Association are urged to read this paper, and also his "Outline of Studies," which will be found in this month's Miscellaneous Department of the journal.

Doctor Wilbur very properly called attention to the need of physicians taking an active part in any survey that might be made on the cost of medical care; since nonparticipation would probably permit the investigation to fall under the supervision and influence of nonmedical persons, less able than physicians to render efficient service to all parties concerned.

Doctor Wilbur pointedly indicated some of the weaknesses in the present methods of handling the business phases of the professional work of physicians and surgeons, and asked if, in this modern era of which we are a part, seemingly all other large businesses keep a constant check on past, present and possible future methods of development—why the medical profession was presumably so indifferent to its own developmental interests; both in relation to its own members, and to the hundreds of thousands of lay citizens who are served by doctors.

He also very rightly placed emphasis upon preserving the personal relationship between the patient and physician as a necessary element for professional progress, initiative and efficiency, and as being a factor, which no system of so-called socialized or state medicine should be permitted to nullify.

Thoughts as pungent as the references just made, also face one when his "Outline of Studies" is read. Therein will be found a large number of very pertinent queries, to which satisfactory and accurate answer cannot be made by even the most learned or versatile among us. That outline is also worthy of careful perusal; and its length may be taken as an expression of the bigness of the problem and work which has been undertaken by this committee which is to investigate the cost of medical care.

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In one portion of his address, Doctor Wilbur asked the question—"What other business does free work as a part of its regular program?"

As indicating to what ends such free professional work may lead, may be cited an experience that has come to our attention in the last week.

The place is the county of Los Angeles, one of the units of government of the state of California. That county maintains a hospital of some 1200 beds for indigent sick and injured citizens. The more than one hundred members of the Los Angeles County Medical Association who are on the attending staff of that institution give

annually professional services of a money value, when gauged on a modest standard, of more than five hundred thousand dollars a year! These doctor citizens of Los Angeles, who year in and year out, so generously give their services to the poor of Los Angeles, are practically the only servant citizens of Los Angeles County who work without pay.

With a knowledge of the bigness of the gratuitous professional services which are so generously given by these doctors, one would be tempted to think that the rich county of Los Angeles would not make an effort to evade the obligations which it bears with the state as a whole, with other counties, with cities and with citizens, when the California industrial accident law comes into play in regard to its own injured county employees.

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The case which came to our attention was as follows: A county employee was injured, went to his former physician, received treatment and went on to good recovery. The statement for services was sent to the county. The auditor sent a letter stating that "the county of Los Angeles cannot be responsible for the payment of this bill" because the injured county employee had been instructed to secure "free medical treatment at the Los Angeles General Hospital."

This means that the board of supervisors and other officers of the county of Los Angeles who are concerned with matters of this kind, presumably hold to the opinion that the county is exempt from paying the fees laid down by the California Industrial Accident Commission for the care of injured employees; and expect the attending staff physicians and surgeons to give gratuitous professional service not only to indigent citizens of Los Angeles county, but to one of the richest counties in the United States!

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This example is mentioned in its relation to Doctor Wilbur's address; to show how lay citizens and officials fail to appreciate the significance of the gratuitous professional service of physicians and surgeons. Of course, we have ourselves largely to blame for much of this; in that we long ago should have so educated these lay fellow citizens and officials as to what were the principles herein involved, and what were our individual and joint professional rights, so that these lay officials and citizens would not have had such distorted notions as to where our gratuitous professional services begin and end.

It may be added that this particular instance, which is only one of many that has occurred in Los Angeles and other counties, has been called to the attention of the California Industrial Accident Commission. The ruling thereon, whatever it be, may serve as a basis for future comment on this subject.

In the meantime every member of the California Medical Association who wishes to keep in touch with those current events in which the interests of his profession and himself are at stake, may well take the time to read the papers by Dr. Ray Lyman Wilbur, which are printed in this issue.